

The Problem of Middle Class Educated Unemployment in Bengal, 1912-1942*

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Youths—pale and haggard, and prematurely sick of life for want of work—going about begging recommendation letters and testimonials from school masters and college lecturers, from barristers and councillors, from magistrates and commissioners are but a familiar, ah! painfully too familiar, sight in Bengal.

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This paper is an attempt to study some aspects of the unemployment problem in Bengal during the period under review. Since the unemployment question was a wide one affecting as it did the various sections of the community in various ways and in different degrees, we have restricted our field of study to the unemployment problem among the educated middle class Bengali community only. Thus this paper intentionally leaves aside the unemployment problem prevailing among the Anglo-Indian community and other sections of the society as it is virtually impossible to study the entire problem of unemployment in the course of such a short paper.

I

Before we proceed further, it is only pertinent that we explain the meaning of certain expressions which we intend to use in this paper. The term "middle class" is one of those expressions in common use, the general significance of which is understood by all, but which it is somewhat diffi-

*Abbreviations used in this article are : *BLCP*=Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, *BSR*=Bangladesh Secretariat Records, *BUEC*=Report of the Government of Bengal Unemployment Committee, Calcutta, 1925, *PAI*=Proceedings of the Department of Agriculture and Industries, Bengal.

¹*BLCP*, 30 March, 1922, p. 398.

cult to explain. According to P. C. Desika Chari the expression included "all those people belonging to classes who have been engaged for ages in literary or quasi-literary or intellectual pursuits, and also those classes who have been engaged in some kind of work or other which is not actually physical manual labour."² It included among the Hindus, according to Bipin Chandra Pal, mainly the three upper castes—the Brahmins, Kayasthas and Baidyas who in many instances were poorer than the agriculturists in certain parts of Bengal.³ Among the Muslims the term included mainly the 'Ashrafs' or the aristocratic class composed of the Sayyids, the Pathans and the Mughals.

There is also the difficulty of giving an exhaustive definition of the expression "educated". The United Provinces Unemployment Committee considered the cases of those who had received education at the universities, intermediate colleges, high schools, vernacular middle schools, or at the industrial or technical institutions or professional colleges or schools and had passed one of the specified examinations as educated.⁴ On the other hand, the Madras Unemployment Committee defined all those persons who had received some form of secondary or higher education as educated.⁵ The Bombay Committee thought it proper to call those who were literate in English as educated differentiating thus the many educated members of the middle classes who did not know English.⁶ If we adopt the Bombay Committee's definition of "educated" for the purpose of our paper, we find that the number of educated men in Bengal were about half a million in 1911 (see Table 1). This figure kept on increasing over the years and by 1931 it had crossed the one million mark or an increase of over 100 per cent between the years 1911 and 1931. Among the Baidyas the increase was 69 per cent. The increase among the Brahmins and the Kayasthas was 61 and 91 per cent respectively.

There is also the term "unemployed". For our purpose of this paper we include all those as unemployed (a) who had once been employed but lost it and (b) persons who were qualified for and desirous of holding a post but had not been able to obtain one. In the case of the latter, the duration of unemployment may be counted, say, from the sixth month after the individual was qualified for a post and desired to obtain one, as it can be reasonably expected that youths leaving schools or colleges would take a few months to find a job. We would, however, not include

²*The Council of State Debates*, 15 February, 1928, Vol. I, p. 107.

³*The Legislative Assembly Debates*, 28 January, Vol. VII, Part I. 1926, pp. 485-86.

⁴*Report of the United Provinces Unemployment Committee*, 1935 (henceforth UPUC), p. 4.

⁵*Labour Gazette*, 27 October, p. 161.

⁶*Report on an Enquiry into Middle Class Unemployment in the Bombay Presidency*, Bombay, 1927, p. 2.

TABLE I
NUMBER OF LITERATES IN ENGLISH IN BENGAL
IN 1911, 1921 AND 1931

	1911	1921	1931
Total literates in			
English in Bengal (all religions)	498,136	778,932	1058,978
Baidya	18,441	26,438	31,227
Brahmin	129,223	184,452	208,573
Kayasth	108,512	162,481	207,078

SOURCES : *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. V, Bengal, Part II, Tables (Calcutta, 1913), pp. 58, 82-83; *Ibid*, 1921, Vol. V, Bengal, Part II, Tables (Calcutta, 1923), pp. 70, 94-95; *Ibid*, 1931, Vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, Part II, Tables (Calcutta, 1932), pp. 161, 184.

those as unemployed who could not get an employment in which they could make the best use of their special knowledge or that of graduates in Law or Science or Arts who could only get petty clerical appointments which were most uncongenial to them but which they accepted as a matter of sheer necessity. Such cases would really be cases of misemployment or of wasteful and uncongenial employment.

As to the total number of unemployed middle class educated men in Bengal, we are quite in the dark. Such statistics were not maintained by the universities and other educational institutions in general or by any department of the government. As far back as 1924 the Bengal Unemployment Committee in one of its recommendations made the suggestion for the establishment of an employment bureau with the object *inter alia* of maintaining a register of educated unemployed persons in this province, but the recommendation was not accepted by the government as it held the view that the development of commerce and industry provided the right remedy for the solution of the unemployment problem and that the least important part of the fight against the menace was the collection of statistics regarding its extent.⁷ However, an attempt was made for the first time to collect statistics of unemployed educated persons who had at least passed the matriculation or school leaving certificate in the Census Report of 1931. But the innovation failed to a large extent. In some cases a sense of delicacy or shame prevented individuals from making returns which they thought would be interpreted as a public declaration that they were parasites incapable of maintaining themselves.⁸ Others thought it not worth their while to fill up the forms as no immediate advantage

⁷BSR Bundle No. 3; PAI (Industries), A Proceedings, September 1937. See printed office notes to Proceedings Nos. 1-13, p. 1.

⁸*Census of India*, 1931, Vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, Part II, Tables, Calcutta, 1932, p. 284.

would result to themselves in the way of getting employment.⁹ Moreover, the decision of the government to make this inquiry was reached and forms and instructions for the collection of these details were issued after the work had already begun which thus obviously failed to include many unemployed persons who would otherwise have been registered as unemployed.¹⁰ But probably the most powerful consideration was the rumour that "All that was wanted was a list of them for the police as political suspects, while another rumour accused the government of trying to win over the unemployed from the Congress party by the false hopes of employment."¹¹ However, with the mounting pressure from various quarters including the International Labour Organisation to tackle the problem of unemployment the Government of India ultimately directed the provincial governments to collect statistics of "employment" rather than "unemployment".¹² This decision the Government of India took as they thought, that in the absence of a scheme of unemployment insurance or of some other substantial inducement to the unemployed to register, whether relating to the educated unemployed or other classes of unemployed no reliable statistics of this character can be collected. Few will take the trouble to make a return unless they have a direct interest in doing so, and the attempts made at the last census, and subsequently in one or two provinces, in this direction, yielded no results of value."¹³ Thus we have actually no reliable data of middle class educated unemployed of the province. Nor do we have statistics regarding the age and civil condition of the unemployed persons; age distribution and duration of unemployment; religion, caste and native place of the unemployed; educational qualification and duration of unemployment; duration of unemployment and salary earned during previous employment; duration of unemployment and means of livelihood; duration of unemployment and number of dependents; duration of employment and causes of leaving last employment and the means adopted to secure employment. All we have is statistics relating to the industrial labour force engaged in different mills and factories of the province.

However, we have some rough estimates from contemporary sources as to the extent of middle class educated unemployed. The Bengal Unemployment Committee although it did not put any numerical figures of *bhadralok* unemployed, was greatly impressed by the acuteness of the

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Census of India, 1931, Vol. I—India, Part I, Report, Delhi, 1933, p. 338.*

¹²*BSR, Bundle No. 3; PAI (Industries), A Proceedings, September 1937, No. 1. See Letter No. L—1834, dated Delhi, 4 May, 1937 from J. A. Mackeown, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, to the Secretary, Government of Bengal in the Commerce Department.*

¹³*Ibid.*

problem.¹⁴ Father A. Gille, Editor of the Catholic Herald of India in his evidence put the figure of unemployed *bhadralok* in Calcutta at 27,000.¹⁵ K. C. Roy Chaudhuri, MLC, put the figure of graduate unemployed at 6,000 in 1922.¹⁶ In 1928, Desika Chari while illustrating the seriousness of the unemployment problem in his speech at the Council of State pointed out that for 23 subordinate posts in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation there were more than 4,500 applications and all the applicants very well qualified.¹⁷ In 1933, the President of the All Bengal Unemployed Youth's Conference D. P. Khaitan claimed that the total number of educated unemployed in Bengal was not less than a lakh¹⁸ while in 1937 K. D. Rozario, MLC, pointed out that over 7,000 professional and improfessional graduates earned degrees from the Calcutta University during the past two years, hardly 10 per cent of them had secured suitable employment.¹⁹ The 1941 Census put the number of educated males unemployed in Calcutta between the ages of 16 and 40 (who could not find employment for a year or more) at 20,521.²⁰ The problem of middle class educated unemployed seems to have deteriorated further with the passage of time. In 1942, Saiyed Muazzamuddin Hosain pointed out in the Bengal Council that the number of *bhadralok* unemployed class was "increasing alarmingly day by day".²¹ It was also found that the less educated ones were the worst sufferers. One contemporary writer remarked "the crux of the middle class unemployment is the matriculate" than amongst the highly educated.²²

II

A host of causes, both 'subjective' and 'objective' were responsible for the unemployment problem. Under the objective causes may be placed the factors which would frequently be termed 'economic', i.e., the state of Bengal's trade, commerce, industry and agriculture and the developmental programmes of the government which directly affected the unemployment situation within the province. The subjective causes, on the other hand, may be classified as educational and social, i.e., the educational and social framework which resulted in swelling the ranks of the unemployed. First

¹⁴BUEC, Vol. I, p. 4.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. II (written and oral evidence), p. 11.

¹⁶BLCP, 30 March, 1922, pp. 394-95.

¹⁷Council of State Debates, February 1928, Vol. I, p. 108.

¹⁸The Indian Economist, 28 August, 1933; p. 784.

¹⁹BLCP, 16 September, 1937, Vol. III, pp. 190-91.

²⁰Census of India, 1941, Vol. IV, Bengal, Tables, Simla, 1942, pp. 29-30.

²¹BLCP, 6 November, 1942, Second Session, 1942, No. 16, p. 449.

²²S. A. Samad, "Unemployment in India" in the Indian Journal of Economics, Vol. XVIII, 1937-38, p. 618.

we would take up the subjective causes of unemployment.

The relationship between government employment and higher education in Bengal had long been intimate. The development of education in English and the creation of universities and colleges were stimulated largely by the need for securing suitable candidates for official appointments.²³ People in large numbers from the *bhadralok* class took to English education which meant service under the government with powers and prestige associated with it. But the number of English educated men were gradually increasing at a much faster rate than the government could absorb and in consequence most of the students who emerged from the universities and colleges especially since the First World War found themselves unable to obtain the main end with which they pursued their studies. Further, it had become at that stage difficult if not impossible for many of them to find alternative employment suited to the training they had received. Thus a large number of students found that their exertions and sacrifices, so far from enabling them to attain a position of responsibility, had made it much more difficult for them to secure a livelihood. This difficulty of absorbing the educated unemployed in the future years was pointed out by the Bengal District Administration Committee in its report in 1914²⁴ but the government did next to nothing to tackle the problem.

The government's inordinate passion for general education was also responsible for large-scale unemployment. Thus when most avenues of employment including the bar and government service became congested in due course of time, it resulted in thousands of unemployed graduates and undergraduates. Had the government given due importance to industrial and technical education in the curriculum, as was the case in all the progressive western countries and in Japan, the situation would probably have been different. True the government did set up a few technical and industrial institutions but those were totally inadequate to the needs of the hour. Even students passing the Board of Apprenticeship Training Admission Examination conducted by the government experienced considerable difficulty in finding a place in the workshops and factories.²⁵ The situation lay in the further development of the senior technical schools such as Kanchrapara and Calcutta Technical schools and the junior and aided technical schools and industrial schools but this the government

²³BSR, Bundle No. 7; PAI (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 4M/5 of 1938. See Letter No. L.1834, 20 January, 1938 from A. G. Clow, Secretary to the Government of India to all provincial governments.

²⁴Report of the Bengal District Administration Committee, 1913-14, Calcutta, 1914, p. 14.

²⁵BSR, Bundle No. 2: PAI (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 1R/7 of 1936, p. 6.

could not do, as it claimed, "owing to financial stringency."²⁶ There was also little correction between the requirements of the employers and the courses of instruction, the standards of instruction and the facilities for training. The subjects taught were almost entirely theoretical with very little or no practical training.²⁷ As such the products of these institutions when they came out found themselves often unacceptable to the employers due to want of practical training. "What we want", said P.S. Sivaswamy, "is a co-ordination between the theoretical and the practical sides of technical education and a co-ordination between the needs of employees and the needs of progress".²⁸

The social values and traditions rooted in our society were no less responsible for the unemployment problem of the period. There was, for example, a false idea of the importance of the profession of law in Bengal in relation to other professions. This trapped a large number of young men into the profession whether they had any aptitude for the profession or not. Thus, in 1932-33, out of some 5,023 male pupils receiving vocational and special education (viz., law, medicine, engineering, commerce and veterinary science) in the university and intermediate level in Bengal, 2,334 or 46.47 per cent were law students.²⁹ It was no wonder, therefore, if many of them found no jobs when they passed out successfully after completion of an expensive legal education.

There was also a sense of false dignity among the members of the middle classes as regards manual labour or taking to humbler occupations. They regarded it as derogatory to their social position to do any manual labour for their maintenance. As such it was considered below their dignity to work in a factory as a simple workman employee.³⁰ Moreover,

²⁶*Ibid.* Most of these technical and industrial schools were in a deplorable condition. Some were rather an expression of zeal and enterprise on the part of one or more private individuals in regard to this important aspect of social life. (Government of Bengal: *Particulars about Technical, Industrial, Agricultural and Veterinary Schools in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1926, see, 'Foreword'). The organisation of these schools, needless to say, was most unsatisfactory. Even institutions like the Bengal Technical Institute lacked equipment, staff and accommodation to make the institute a success. See E.H. Atkinson and S. Dawson, *Report on the Enquiry to bring Technical Institutions into Closer Touch and More Practical Relation with the Employers of Labour*, Calcutta, 1912, p. 92.

²⁷BUEC, Vol. II, p. 24.

²⁸*The Legislative Assembly Debates*, 28 January, 1926, Vol. VIII, Part I, p. 457.

²⁹*Report on Public Instruction in Bengal for the Year 1932-33*, Alipore, 1934, pp. 72-73.

³⁰This averseness to manual labour which was the hallmark of the middle class was undoubtedly a social evil. Both the government and some public-spirited gentlemen were trying during this period to change this attitude among the middle class educated Bengalis towards physical manual labour to solve the problem of unemployment. It was impossible as H. Calvert once remarked in the Legislative Assembly, to provide jobs for every middle class educated youth in superior posts

Bengali workmen were not painstaking or hardy enough to stand near a furnace and work in the scorching heat,³¹ they also felt it insulting to work alongside ordinary *mistris* and to submit to the necessary discipline of manufacturing establishments.³² Even when employed, it was found that many Bengalis left their jobs on the slightest pretext or provocation.³³ The result was that employers were driven to the conclusion that Bengali *bhadralok* youth do not make efficient and contented hands.³⁴ The only option open for the owners of industrial establishments was to recruit large numbers of skilled and unskilled up-countrymen to fill up the vacancies which otherwise should have been filled up by the Bengalis. Thus we find from Table 2 that the majority of the workmen (skilled and unskilled taken together) in the jute, paper, glass, ice-factories, battery and dry-cell factories, aluminium and enamel works, paint, colour and varnish works, electric supply companies, silk mills, tea estates, plumbing trade, motor transport business and gas companies were non-Bengalis.³⁵ Besides, they had also captured the market and were doing a roaring business while the Bengalis were no better than helots in their own province. The solution of the problem lay in changing the social attitude of the *bhadralok* class towards manual and other humbler jobs.³⁶ But this was undoubtedly a difficult task and the progress in this regard was slow as had been pointed out by the Bengal Unemployment Committee.³⁷

Immigration from lower classes into the *bhadralok* class was yet another important cause of unemployment. Classes hitherto employed in

in mills and factories. He pointed out that in the Indian factories for every 100 persons employed, there were only about 3 employed in superior posts, 26 in skilled jobs and 71 in unskilled jobs. Moreover, job creation was itself a difficult task. An investment of Rs 10,000, could provide jobs for 500 people only who could hope to take part in supervision and direction. See *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 28 January 1926, p. 465. Sir George Godfrey, Agent, Bengal-Nagpur Railway also thought that the sons of the lower-middle classes could take up much of the work which was then done on railways by the coolie class. He felt that lower wages could be paid to them if they were more intelligent and did the work of two of the present type. *The Modern Review*, April 1925, pp. 453-54.

³¹Government of Bengal, *New Avenues of Employment for Bengali Youths*, Vol. II, Alipore, 1940, p. 34.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 4.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵The table was compiled by the Government of Bengal to show that there were enough employment opportunities for willing Bengalis in the industrial establishments of the province. It was only their attitude towards manual labour which prevented them from taking to those jobs. As a result up-countrymen had to be imported to fill in the vacancies of skilled and unskilled categories of workers in most of the mills and factories of Bengal.

³⁶*BUEC*, Vol. I, p. 25.

³⁷*Ibid.*

TABLE 2
CONSOLIDATED FIGURES OF EMPLOYMENT IN CERTAIN
SELECTED INDUSTRIES IN BENGAL, 1939

	<i>Bengalis</i>	<i>Non-Bengalis</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of Bengalis</i>	<i>% of non- Bengalis</i>
Cotton mills	18,740	12,541	31,281	60	40
Jute mills	49,668	154,149	203,817	24	76
Cotton & jute presses	18,692	11,984	30,676	61	39
Paper mills	2,541	4,628	7,169	35	65
Rubber factories	2,420	1,924	4,344	56	44
Glass factories	367	1,981	2,348	16	84
Cement, lime & pottery factories	2,616	1,429	4,045	65	35
Aerated water & ice factories	136	772	908	15	85
Battery & dry-cell factories	255	663	918	28	72
Pen & pencil factories	530	302	832	64	36
Salt factories	332	52	384	86	14
Aluminium & enamel works	1,074	1,656	2,730	39	61
Leather & shoe factories	2,751	1,312	4,063	68	32
Paint, colour & varnish works	690	1,024	1,714	40	60
Chemical and pharmaceutical works	3,264	2,211	5,475	60	40
Soap works	583	537	1,120	52	48
Kerosene & petrol installations	1,072	808	1,880	57	43
Fan & electric works	1,179	396	1,575	75	25
Match factories	1,596	2,978	4,574	35	65
General engineering workshops	19,936	15,769	35,705	56	44
Electric supply companies	1,774	3,452	5,226	34	66
Silk mills	555	1,693	2,248	25	75
Sugar mills	947	1,219	2,166	44	56
*Tea estates	4,596	86,952	91,548	5	95
Collieries	14,727	10,412	25,139	59	41
Plumbing trade	72	1,570	1,642	5	95
Automobile engineering workshops	1,074	538	1,642	67	33
Motor transport business	11,340	24,741	36,081	31	69
River transport business	327,101	37,293	364,394	90	10
Film companies	479	402	881	54	46
Insurance companies	1,856	576	2,432	76	24
Banks	2,252	1,215	3,467	65	35
Gas companies	225	1,255	1,480	15	85

*Hill-men have been counted as non-Bengalis, but strictly speaking they should be counted as Bengalis.

SOURCE : *New Avenues of Employment for Bengali Youths*, Vol. II. Alipore, 1940, Appendix A. p. 143. The figures of employment are those of skilled and unskilled labourers taken together.

hereditary professions as artisans, carpenters and so forth had crowded into the clerical professions with the result that there were more candidates than there were places to offer them.³⁸ This movement by the lower classes to force themselves into the precincts hitherto reserved for the middle class was due solely to social causes. Nor was this unnatural as they realised that government service was a social advancement. Moreover, while the lower classes were pressing upwards into the precincts reserved for the middle classes, the middle classes themselves whose hereditary occupation was mainly clerical work were rigid and did not give way by going into other avenues of employment.³⁹

There was also the gradual flow of the educated middle classes from villages to towns. This was mainly a desire for a higher standard of living and also due to the rise in the cost of living.⁴⁰ The Bengal Unemployment Committee found that during the last 30 or 40 years there had been a considerable rise in the standard of living among the educated classes in Bengal.⁴¹ This necessitated increased expenditure unless prices fell at an equivalent rate. But since the level of prices in Bengal had been rising and the income of the middle classes remained very much a "constant quantity"⁴² (as this class was seldom a producer) some members of the family were forced to take employment in the towns. Many educated men also left their villages and trekked to the towns, principally to Calcutta, for reasons such as lack of sanitation, bad water-supply, general absence of the amenities of life and the decay of local industries in the rural areas.⁴³

Among other social causes of unemployment may be mentioned the deadening effect of caste and early marriage. Caste restrictions prevented educated men from taking to useful occupations which were regarded as *infra dig* in the particular communities of which they belonged. Early marriage, on the other hand, prevented the youths from training themselves properly, nor could they wait for better opportunities as family burdens often compelled them to take to any job that came before them.⁴⁴ The nature of the jobs usually being unskilled, they were also liable to be retrenched first during periods of economic oscillation.

Economic causes in the wake of trade depressions were also responsible for widespread unemployment since World War I. Previous to the war, most of the goods needed by the government were supplied by indent

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 11; *Council of State Debates*, 15 February, 1928, Vol. I, p. 113.

³⁹*Council of State Debates*, 15 February, 1928, Vol. I, p. 113.

⁴⁰For details on the rise of prices, see, K.L. Datta, *Report on the Enquiry into the Rise of Prices in India*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1914, pp. 29-33.

⁴¹*BUEC*, Vol. I, p. 10,

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 82.

from the India Office, London.⁴⁵ But during the war restrictions were placed on shipping space and on trade as a result of which supplies of goods were considerably reduced.⁴⁶ This shortage of goods on the one hand, and ready money price available on the other for a wide range of commodities, including a large variety new to the manufacturing economy of India focussed the attention of the people on the development of industries.⁴⁷ Hence there resulted in Bengal an artificial development of industries which provided employment to a large number of educated Bengalis. Then came the slump at the end of the war. Many business concerns had to be closed down and many others reduced their numbers of employees. The 1930's were also years of economic recession which resulted in thousands unemployed as elsewhere in the world.⁴⁸ The worst sufferers of trade depression were always the middle classes as they could not fall back upon agriculture unlike the working class.⁴⁹

General trade depression no doubt had a great deal to do with the unemployment situation of the period, no less was it due to the slow and halting industrialisation of the province. This lack of optimum industrialisation was due to a number of causes. Primary among those were the lack of state patronage, foreign competition, lack of industrial finance and want of commercial, technical and practical experience on the part of the local entrepreneurs.⁵⁰ In the absence of adequate industrialisation, many people who would otherwise have been employed remained idle. There was also the fact that agriculture which supported more than 80 percent of the inhabitants of the province also offered no career for the educated men. "If the province were in a state of balance between industry and agriculture" observed Khan Bahadur Azizul Haque "the number of men passing through the university each year would not be so large after all that they could not be absorbed within the province."⁵¹ Along

⁴⁵A.Z.M. Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, *The Industrial Development of Bengal, 1900-1939*, (New Delhi, Vikas, 1982, Chapter 2, p. 31, Table 2.2.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴⁸For example, the number of operatives employed in registered factories in Bengal fell from 563,877 in 1930 to 480,439 in 1931, a decrease of 83,438 or 15 per cent. See BSR, Bundle No. 16, Commerce, B Proceedings of the Government of Bengal, July 1932, No. 322B, p. 3.

⁴⁹BUEC, Vol. I, p. 15.

⁵⁰Awwal, *op cit.*, pp. 343-346.

⁵¹Quoted in the *Indian Economist*, 3 February, 1936, Vol. VI, No. 15, p. 515. Khan Bahadur Azizul Haque (1890-1947) was Education Minister of Bengal from 1934 to 1937. He became the Speaker of the Assembly in early 1937. In the following year he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University. In 1941 he became High Commissioner for India in London, and in 1943 Member in Charge of Commerce and Food, Government of India. He continued to be a member of the Governor-General's Executive Council till 1945.

with the undeveloped state of Bengal's agriculture and industry, the limited public works carried out by the Government of Bengal depressed the situation further. The administrative policies pursued by the British government in India also somewhat limited the avenues of employment for educated *bhadralok* youths. Thus many avenues such as the army, navy and mercantile marine were closed to Indians.⁵² Nor were the Indians allowed to go out of the country to settle elsewhere in the world.⁵³

The cumulative effect on the middle class unemployed *bhadralok* was extremely grave. Not only did it mean a waste of trained and educated manpower who would have done credit to any country, but still more important was the repercussion of the middle class unemployment problem on the political condition of the province. It was held that the cry for *swaraj* was due to the acuteness of economic distress prevailing among the middle class community.⁵⁴ It was also believed that unemployment reinforced the ranks of the professional agitators and was the root cause of the growth of terrorist activities in the province. "Employ the unemployed, and you deprive him of his capacity for mischief" remarked one of the members of the Legislative Council.⁵⁵ The unemployment problem was also dubbed as the core of the communal problem and of provincialism.⁵⁶ According to Sibnath Banerjee at least 75 to 80 per cent of the fight between Hindus and Muslims was due to unemployment.⁵⁷ Similarly, the question of provincialism which was becoming acute day by day in Bengal was also claimed to be due to the same cause.⁵⁸

III

The seriousness of the unemployment problem attracted the attention of the intelligentsia as early as 1912. In that year Hon'ble Nawab Mushraff Hussain Khan Bahadur had tabled a resolution on the subject of unemployment in the Council, but the country was then not prepared to hear him.⁵⁹ From then onwards the question was raised off and on, both

⁵²*The Council of State Debates*, 15 February, 1928, Vol. I, p. 109.

⁵³*The Legislative Council Debates*, 28 January, 1926, Vol. VII, Part I, p. 464. The Government of India by their Defence of India (consolidated) Rules, 1915 prohibited the emigration, except by licence, of all unskilled labour for the purpose of or with the intention of labouring for hire in 1917. *The Statesman*, 30 March, 1921, p. 9.

⁵⁴*BLCP*, 30 March, 1922, p. 388.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁵⁶*Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, 15 December, 1939, Vol. LV-No. 3, p. 185.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*BLCP*, 15 September, 1937, Vol. III, pp. 151-152. Nawab Musharraff Hussain Khan Bahadur (1871-1966) was a member of the Bengal Legislative Council continuously from 1923 to 1936. In 1927 he was the appointed Education Minister of

inside and outside the Council and in the newspapers. They not only pointed out the gravity of the situation and its possible repercussions on the political and economic life of the province, but were able to convince the provincial government to take up the responsibility of tackling the problem. Thus, before 1922, the Bengal government was of the opinion that it was not the function of the government to provide employment for the middle classes or any other classes and consequently there was no department of government which was directly concerned with the question of unemployment.⁶⁰ But from 1922 onwards the Agriculture and Industries Department was entrusted to look after the matter.⁶¹ The Government of Bengal was even forced to accept an amended resolution in the Council moved by Rai Radha Charan Pal Bahadur to appoint a committee "to study, investigate, and report upon the problem of unemployment of the educated middle class in Bengal" and to suggest "remedial and preventive measures".⁶² Various suggestions were also put forward to solve the problem of middle class educated unemployed by public leaders and the intelligentsia. *The Modern Review* stressed the necessity of "sufficient number of institutions for technical, industrial and technological training" in order to solve the problem of unemployment.⁶³ Deshbandhu C.R. Das had submitted a village reconstruction scheme to the Bengal government by means of which these unemployed middle class people could be usefully employed but it was turned down by the government for no obvious reason.⁶⁴ *The Indian Economist* suggested the development of new industries, expansion of existing ones and a larger scope for employment of Bengalis in all of them.⁶⁵ Babu Devi Prasad Khaitan also suggested the development of industries as the only solution to the problem.⁶⁶ Others suggested the expansion of economic activities and a state of balance between industry and agriculture or 'back to land' and also a change in the attitude of mind on the part of Bengali *bhadralok* towards manual jobs. Practical efforts were also put forward by some non-official gentlemen for the purpose of reducing the problem of unemployment. The late Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University Sir Ashutosh

Bengal. During 1937-41 he was the Judicial Minister of Bengal. He served as a Minister of Bengal again from 1943 to 1945. He was awarded the title of Nawab in 1926. Earlier he was made Khan Bahadur.

⁶⁰*BSR*, Bundle No. 1; *PAI* (Industries), A Proceedings, November 1923. See printed office notes attached to proceeding nos. 1-12.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²*BLCP*, 30 March, 1922, p. 405.

⁶³*The Modern Review*, July 1928, p. 109.

⁶⁴*The Legislative Assembly Debates*, 28 January, 1926, Vol. VII, Part I, pp. 453-54; *Council of State Debates*, 15 February, 1928, Vol. I, p. 109.

⁶⁵*The Indian Economist*, 11 May, 1936, Vol. VII, No. 5, pp. 156-57.

⁶⁶*BLCP*, 30 March, 1922, p. 396.

Mukherjee had directed his attention to this matter.⁶⁷ The Maharaja of Cassimbazar had also founded an Indian polytechnic institute, and the principal of that institute, Captain Petavel had been carrying on propaganda in this direction among the educated classes.⁶⁸

On the other hand, the attitude and response on the part of the capitalists to employ and train Bengali youths had been minimal. Even the firms located within the province and supplying stores to the government did not offer adequate training facilities to the Bengali youth. "Private industrial enterprise is not generally willing . . . to provide employment or opportunities for apprenticeship training at the instance or direction of government or any other body interested in such altruistic purposes" observed the Director of Industries, Bengal.⁶⁹ This was alleged to be due to a deliberate policy on the part of the capitalists to keep up an army of unemployed with a view to depress their rate of wages when in difficulty.⁷⁰ But probably more important, it was due to the preferential treatment meted out by the capitalists to the men of their own community. Since most industries were owned and controlled by foreigners and non-provincials, there was a general apathy on their part to employ Bengali educated youths. This was testified by no less than the External Capital Committee which said: "Investors will always prefer to choose their own directorate, and will naturally prefer men they know and have a prejudice in favour of their own nationality. The tendency will be the same in respect of the superior staff."⁷¹ The same tendency was also observed by the government which in a memorandum in 1939 noted the unwillingness on the part of some of the firms to provide adequate training facilities to Bengali apprentices which unfortunately had bearing on the increasing extent of unemployment among the educated middle classes of the province.⁷² However, there were exceptions to this rule. For example, the Ludlow Jute Mills had put a scheme into operation since 1922 which aimed at the filling of subordinate posts as high as that of departmental manager from amongst the dependents of all classes of employees irrespective of caste or creed.⁷³ The Marwari Chamber of Commerce

⁶⁷*The Legislative Assembly Debates*, 28 January, 1926, Vol. VIII, Part I, p. 455.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹BSR, Bundle No. 2; PAI (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 1R/7 of 1936. See letter 26 July, 1936 from A. T. Weston, Director of Industries, Bengal, to the Secretary, Government of Bengal in the Agriculture and Industries Department.

⁷⁰*Bengal Legislative Assembly Debates*, 15 December, 1939, Vol. LV-No. 3, p. 185.

⁷¹*Report of the External Capital Committee*, 1925, (Calcutta, 1925), p. 8.

⁷²BSR, Bundle No. 11, PAI (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 8E/(11) of 1939. See memorandum No. 377(21), dt. Calcutta 10 February, 1939.

⁷³BSR, Bundle No. 10, Commerce, B Proceedings of the Government of Bengal, April 1930. Nos. 40-41B, p. 29.

though late, also assured the government of its willingness "to render every kind of assistance and facility to the students of this useful institution [the Bengal Textile Institute, Serampore] in regard to their employment notwithstanding any consideration".⁷⁴ But other associations like the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and the Indian Chamber of Commerce declined to cooperate fully with the government as regards the employment of graduate *bhadralok* youth in industrial establishments or trading concerns.⁷⁵

As for the government, till the beginning of the 1930's it did almost next to nothing to alleviate the problem of middle class unemployment. It is only with the onset of the depression, when the economic situation assumed serious proportion with increased terrorist activities, that the government decided to act.⁷⁶ The outcome was the Middle Class Unemployment Relief Scheme. The scheme initiated from 1932-33 provided for the establishment of 28 demonstration parties in seven important local and indigenous industries.⁷⁷ The period of demonstration in any one centre by each party was not to exceed six months. The immediate objective was to give the unemployed *bhadralok* an opportunity to be trained in the new and improved processes which would effect remunerative occupation.⁷⁸ Among the industries selected were the preparation of jute and woollen textiles; umbrella handle-bending and marketing; cover making and assembling; preparation of brass and bell-metal; preparation of *daos*, knives and other cutlery articles; moulding and throwing of pottery articles on an improved potters' wheel; preparation of boots and shoes and other leather products; and the manufacture of good quality washing soap.⁷⁹ It was claimed by the government that the demonstration parties attracted considerable interest and popularity and that even graduates and post-graduates applied for admission in the training classes in the

⁷⁴BSR, Bundle No. 10; PAI (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 1C/5 of 1940. Letter No. 103, of 10 January 1940 from Hon. Secretary, Marwari Chamber of Commerce to the Director of Industries, Bengal.

⁷⁵BSR, Bundle No. 12; PAI, (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 8E/1 of 1940. Letter of N. Das of 13 May 1940.

⁷⁶The most important consideration of the Bengal Government was undoubtedly the containment of terrorist activities. In a memorandum the Government wrote "It is recognised that economic depression, and in particular unemployment provides one field of recruitment to the terrorist movement and the reduction of unemployment, so far as this is possible forms one part of Government's anti-terrorist campaign." BSR, Bundle No. 3; PAI (Industries), A Proceedings, November 1935. See printed office notes attached to Proceedings Nos. 1-4.

⁷⁷The scheme has been elaborately outlined in BSR, Bundle No. 3; PAI (Industries), A Proceedings, March 1935 in the printed office notes attached to Proceedings Nos. 8-10, p. 5.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

districts.⁸⁰ Not only that, it was further claimed, many young men of the *bhadralok* class started small factories or secured employment in the established industries.⁸¹ But it is difficult to believe that the scheme was really anything near the success claimed by the Government of Bengal. Firstly, only Rs. 100,000 was sanctioned annually for the scheme.⁸² This small amount of money necessarily limited the extension of training facilities to wider areas. Secondly, the scheme did not provide for grants of loans to successful students who intended to start businesses or purchase machinery. "No financial obligation or responsibility of any kind is undertaken by the Department . . . but in case of financial difficulties the students are eligible for applying for industrial loans under the State Aid to Industries Act".⁸³ Unfortunately, however, due to the narrowness of the provisions of the Act, it was difficult to obtain loans under the said Act.⁸⁴ Another handicap was as regards marketing of cottage industry products. This was a problem which the Bengal government failed to solve properly till 1947. "Until these two important factors", observed S. C. Mitter, the Director of Industries, Bengal "namely finance and marketing, are brought to its aid, it may not be, in my humble opinion, desirable to enquire into the working of the Unemployment Relief Scheme."⁸⁵

Among other schemes of the local government one was for the training of *bhadralok* youths in practical agriculture for a year at the Government Agricultural Farm in Faridpur.⁸⁶ During this period instruction was given in agricultural carpentry, elementary veterinary knowledge and the principles of cooperative credit. On completion of the year's training each lad was provided with a 15 bigha plot of government *khasmahal* land, rent free, for three years, and a loan of Rs 200.⁸⁷ At the end of three years a *raiya* settlement of the plot was made at the prevailing rate of rent, but without *salami*.⁸⁸ In 1938, a watch repairing class was started at the

⁸⁰ *Annual Administration Report of the Department of Industries, Bengal for 1933-34*, pp. 5-6.

⁸¹ See extract of letter by Hon'ble Nawab Farouqi, Minister of Industries and Agriculture, Bengal, 18 April, 1935 to the Chairman of the U.P. Unemployment Committee. *UPUC*, pp. 14-15.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *BSR*, Bundle No. 5; *PAI* (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 1C/19 of 1937. See Note on the scheme for helping educated young men in starting small scale industries, p. 3.

⁸⁴ See Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, "Genesis and Operation of the Bengal State Aid to Industries Act, 1931," in the *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XVII, No. 4, 1980, pp. 409-19.

⁸⁵ *BSR*, Bundle No. 4; *PAI* (Industries), B Proceedings, March 1938, No. 26B, p. 2. See S. C. Mitter's minute dated 4 January, 1938.

⁸⁶ *Labour Gazette*, March 1931, Vol. X, No. 7, p. 687.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Edward Industrial School, Bogra as an experimental measure for a period of three years to train young men who were eager to adopt this profession as a career.⁸⁹ In 1939, the government of Bengal also inaugurated a scheme for the award of 29 scholarships for middle class communities (primarily meant for Muslims) for industrial and technical training within and outside the province.⁹⁰ But probably the most fruitful measure of the local government was the creation of a temporary post of Employment Adviser under the Agriculture and Industries Department with effect from 1 July, 1938. His most important work was the preparation of two handbooks on avenues of employment for Bengali youth. The first volume gave details of opportunities in the Imperial and Superior Central Services, in the army, navy and air force, in the various miscellaneous departments under the Government of India, in the services under the control of the Government of Bengal and in the railways, tramway companies, port trusts and the local authorities in Bengal.⁹¹ The second volume covered facts and figures in the various industries and trades of Bengal and also in a few non-official public organisations. In all 27 industries, 11 trades and professions and 5 non-official public organisations had been covered in the second handbook. There was also a separate section on agriculture and farming as a profession.⁹² The reason for giving importance to the preparation of handbooks was that not even 5 per cent of those interviewed by the Employment Adviser knew anything about the prospects of employment in the departments under the Government of India.⁹³ In this regard the universities also took no initiative to collect facts about the avenues of employment and the Government of Bengal, therefore, "rightly decided to fill in the gap".⁹⁴ The Employment Adviser was also permitted from 1 March 1940 to negotiate with businessmen and industrialists to widen the scope of Bengali young men as regards their employment and facilities for training. Due to the personal intervention of the Employment Adviser, 60 Bengali youth got jobs mainly in the mills and factories in 1940-41.⁹⁵

⁸⁹BSR, Bundle No. 8, *PAI* (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 2B/44 of 1938.

⁹⁰BSR, Bundle No. 3, *PAI* (Industries), A Proceedings, July 1939, Nos. 7 & 9, pp. 1-2.

⁹¹Government of Bengal, *New Avenues of Employment for Bengali Youths*, Vol. II, Alipore, 1940, p. 3.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³Government of Bengal, *Handbook on Avenues of Employment*, Vol. I, Alipore, 1939, p. 3.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*

⁹⁵These jobs were provided in the various cotton mills (16), Calcutta Clinical Research Associates Limited (6), Britannia Building and Iron Company (4), Oriental Gas Company (2), Agarpara Jute Mills (10), Ordnance and Rifle Factories and Air Force Volunteer Reserve (15) and the Eastern Bengal Railway Kanchrapara Workshop (7). See BSR, Bundle No. 12, *PAI* (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 8E/1 of 1940. Note by N. Das, dt. 13 May, 1940.

From the discussions above, we find that although the local government did take certain actions to reduce unemployment, the measures adopted were inadequate for the swarming mass of educated men coming out of the high schools, colleges and universities at an ever increasing rate. The Government of Bengal tried to excuse itself by pleading financial stringency but the matter does not end there. When lakhs of rupees could be spent to contain terrorist activities within the province, when money was being wasted on setting up factories for ex-detenus,⁹⁶ surely money could also be found for this important work. Moreover, with the inauguration of the autonomy under the Act of 1935 there had been an average of Rs 30,000,000 in Bengal's income annually over the average income under the Montford regime⁹⁷ but hardly any additional money was made available to fight the menace of unemployment. It was also unfortunate that the central government remained silent on such an important issue. Hon'ble Sir Bhupendra Nath Mitra, Member for Industries and Labour thought that the nature of the problem was such that the Government of India could do but little in the matter.⁹⁸ Apart from that it was considered to be a provincial subject. But as the U.P. Unemployment Committee so rightly pointed out: "We are distinctly of the opinion that there are several remedial measures which can be taken only by the Government of India and in regard to which the Local Governments, whether on the Transferred or Reserved side, must find themselves unable to take action independently of the Government of India. The question of unemployment is intimately connected with the development of big industries and the development of big industries, in its turn, raises many intricate questions of policy relating to Finance, Currency, Tariffs, etc., which are clearly outside the scope of the Provincial Governments. It is conceivable also that in regard to the development of agriculture too there may arise, and there will probably arise, many questions of policy which will be beyond the purview of the Local Governments."⁹⁹

⁹⁶While only Rs 100,000 was sanctioned annually for the Unemployment Relief Scheme, the Government made liberal provisions for the training of persons considered politically dangerous. For example, the Art and United Potteries at Belghurria organised by the Department of Industries for the ex-detenus was provided with a capital loan of Rs 3,61,173 from public funds. See BSR, Bundle No. 9; PAI (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 8A/7 of 1940. Due to mismanagement of the factories set up for them and run by ex-detenus the government in many instances had to seize the properties. BSR, Bundle No. 11; PAI (Industries), B Proceedings, File No. 4D/9 of 1939. See letter of S.C. Mitter, Director of Industries dt. 16 May, 1939 to the Secretary, Agriculture and Industries Department, Bengal.

⁹⁷Haricharan Ghose, "Review of Finances in Bengal (1937-41)" in the *Indian Journal of Economics*, Vol. XXI, 1940-41, pp. 569-93.

⁹⁸The Legislative Assembly Debates, 28 January, 1926, Vol VII Part I, pp. 487-93.

⁹⁹UPUC, pp. 18-19.

CONCLUSION

From a discussion on the subject it becomes clear that there was an acute unemployment problem among the middle class educated youth during the period under review. This problem continued to mount with the passage of time with the result that Bengalis who were considered "the best politically minded section in the country"¹⁰⁰ soon became alienated by British rule. They allied themselves with political parties, organised into revolutionary groups and carried out terrorist activities in every nook and corner of the province. Not only that, as the middle class in Bengal wielded considerable influence among the masses¹⁰¹ they were able to create an anti-British feeling in the country by their propaganda of hatred against the British Raj. Had the British Raj taken timely steps to solve middle class grievances—the most important of which was the question of unemployment—it could probably have delayed the transfer of power.

¹⁰⁰ *The Indian Economist*, 27 February, 1939, p. 573.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 11 May, 1936, pp. 156-57.